

INTRODUCTION

“**M**aine; a natural treasure.” Our cleanest waters are nationally recognized, and most who reside here are working to keep it that way. It is the purpose of the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Land and Water Quality (DEP BLWQ), as well as of other bureaus, to work with people to protect these vital resources for all to enjoy. This involves more than licensing, regulation, enforcement and environmental disaster response. Now more than ever it involves public education, technical assistance to industry, municipalities, and individuals, and pollution prevention.

It is also a function of the DEP to develop and report water quality information. The basic requirements for this process are set forth in the Federal Clean Water Act (CWA) of 1972. The CWA still guides water pollution control programs more than 20 years after it was enacted by Congress. It stresses that each state assign beneficial or designated uses to their waters, such as swimming or drinking water supply. At a minimum, waters must provide for "the protection and propagation of fish, shellfish, and wildlife," and provide for "recreation in and on the water". These federal standards are minimum requirements which came to be known as the "fishable and swimmable" goals of the Act. State standards must be equal or higher. The Maine DEP is required by law to take action when our waters do not meet state or federal standards.

Many improvements have occurred in the quality of Maine waters in the past 20 years. The results have been dramatic and Mainers should be proud. Atlantic salmon and other fish now return to Maine rivers, and waters that were once open sewers are now clean enough to swim in. Unfortunately, Maine people are still not able to use all their waters. **Point source pollution** (pollution coming directly from a pipe into the water) is now mostly under control. However, **nonpoint source pollution** (pollution contained within runoff coming from the land) is not under control. Groundwater, wetlands, rivers, lakes and coastal waters continue to be threatened by toxins, bacteria, excess nutrients, and poorly planned development.

Section 305(b) of the CWA requires that the States periodically assess their water quality for fulfillment of the fishable and swimmable goals of the Act and report the results to Congress. The information contained in this document is a condensed version of Maine's Water Quality Assessment for 1996, the "305(b)" report. It contains a broad overview of the current condition of Maine's waters, as well as a brief description of Bureau programs. Several definitions are also contained within this version, immediately following terminology in bold faced type. Wherever possible it is also noted that a reader may contact the DEP BLWQ to request the complete 305(b) for additional details. Water quality information for specific water bodies throughout the state is contained in the appendices of the complete report. Please also note the names and numbers of contact people who are listed within this document that may be called to answer questions or concerns.